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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4168
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUZEHAA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NIGER: WILL ELECTIONS BE POSTPONED?

REF: A. (A) 07 NIAMEY 1301 (NOTAL)
 1B. (B) 07 NIAMEY 1270 (NOTAL)
 1C. (C) 07 NIAMEY 1237 (NOTAL)

11. (U) The National Council for Political Dialogue (known by its French acronym CNDP), which comprises all political parties, has been meeting in closed session since late February. It is expected to submit recommendations to the government.

12. (SBU) There is widespread speculation about whether the CNDP will recommend postponing elections. Niger's worst kept secret for some time has been that the GON would likely

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postpone local elections scheduled for later this year. The Prime Minister essentially told the diplomatic corps as much in October, saying the matter would be considered by the CNDP (ref a). This would be relatively uncontroversial, and would save money if the local elections were held concurrently with national elections scheduled for November and December of 12009. The elected local councils have been largely ineffective, due both the quality of their members and the GON's failure to implement fully its decentralization program.

13. (SBU) Postponement of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections would be far more controversial. While President Tandja has publicly said he would not seek to stay in office beyond his current mandate, which ends in December 2009 (ref b), some of his actions suggest otherwise (ref c). The Nigerien constitution not only precludes him from serving a third term, but explicitly does not allow amending the section that precludes him from doing so.

14. (SBU) There is some speculation that, rather than seek a new term, Tandja may try to extend his current term by claiming that the country cannot afford or is otherwise incapable of holding elections as scheduled. The ongoing rebellion in the north could provide a justification for such a move.

15. (SBU) Comment: Any attempt by Tandja to stay in office beyond 2009 would elicit strong, possibly violent, opposition. If such an attempt succeeded, it would be a major setback in Niger's democratic transition; next year's elections should mark the country's first transfer of power from one elected president to another.

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